

# Healthy Farmers Market 2023 Season Report



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## SECTION 1: 2023 SEASON OVERVIEW

### MARKET OVERVIEW

The Healthy Farmers Market (HFM) is a partnership of six organizations whose collective vision and mission are to inspire, nurture and support healthy communities by increasing access to farm-fresh, locally grown fruits and vegetables to those facing food insecurity. The goal is to cultivate a marketplace that fosters community while offering residents access to affordable, culturally relevant and healthy food, health education, community resources and preventative health services all in one location. A secondary goal is to encourage, support, and promote the entrepreneurial efforts of local, independent, and small-scale business owners seeking to sell products directly to the consumer.

The 2023 Healthy Farmers Market Steering Committee members include Adams County Health Department (ACHD), Adams County Department of Human Services (ACDHS), City of Thornton, East Denver Food Hub (EDFH), Anythink Library, and the American Heart Association's Colorado Chapter (AHA). Each partner brings their own unique perspectives and organizational resources to operate the market.

The market is implemented as a community partnership reducing barriers and facilitating food and nutrition access for residents. Eligible customers are provided a monetary voucher to access local produce and foods at peak freshness in an atmosphere that encourages wholesome, healthful eating. This season, \$20 produce vouchers were provided to community members over the age of 65, Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) recipients, and Women, Infants and Children Program (WIC) recipients. This year, the market also expanded voucher eligibility to community members who receive Medicaid benefits.

Since 2018, Anythink Libraries has been the host site for the Healthy Farmers Market. This season, the market was held Tuesdays at Anythink Huron Street Library and on Thursdays at Anythink Wright Farms Library from 9:00am to 12:00pm. The market operated from the third week in June through the last week in September except for July 4<sup>th</sup> week and Labor Day week. There were 23 market days that spanned 13 weeks.

This report provides a comprehensive overview of the 2023 market season. It highlights market accomplishments and improvements made this year. It also covers the challenges the market faced and recommends solutions that could be implemented next year. Market performance is evaluated using data collected over the season and suggestions are made to help guide the next Healthy Farmers Market Manager, Steering Committee Members and Key Stakeholders.

The 2023 growth of the market and expansion of voucher eligibility and nutrition incentive programming have provided even greater access to no cost and affordable, locally grown produce for both paying customers and voucher recipients. This season the total dollar value of produce provided at no cost to the community was \$74,120, a 79% increase from 2022. Through the WIC Farmer's Market Nutrition Program (FMNP), the value of produce provided at no cost to WIC recipients was \$6,670, making the Healthy Farmers Market one of the highest redemption markets compared to other markets participating in the program statewide.

Onsite surveys at the market are implemented to gather quantitative data and determine voucher eligibility. The ARCGIS survey interfaces with the Healthy Farmers Market Data Dashboard.<sup>1</sup> Qualitative data was gathered through the 2023 Community Listening Sessions, returned surveys, comments from cards returned at the market and informal feedback from customers. The annual Healthy Farmers Market Community Feedback Survey will be launched in 2024 to collect feedback on the 2023 season. These evaluation methods allow the Steering Committee to analyze customer experience, inform future market planning efforts, and to help inform a sustainable market model.

The produce vendor, East Denver Food Hub (EDFH), prioritizes purchasing wholesale produce and foods while reducing logistical and financial burdens for farms owned by historically and currently marginalized farmers throughout the state. EDFH helps create an atmosphere for customers to learn about new foods and new ways to use familiar foods. Their participation in the market will ensure that the market can continue to offer a wide variety of Colorado grown produce at affordable prices.

The market hosted 16 local businesses providing healthy food, drinks, crafts, and local art. The market also hosted 21 community resources providing onsite referrals, services, and information, including benefits enrollment and rental assistance. On selected market dates, Anythink Library provided entertainment, such as music, circus performers, and no-cost caricature drawings for customers, to help create a fun and inviting atmosphere.

In the 2023 season and for the first time, funding for the entire market was provided by American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) funds through Adams County Human Services Department. In addition, Adams County Health Department provided funds to the City of Thornton to contract a Market Manager.

**MARKET IMPACT**

The 2023 Healthy Farmers Market season saw a significant increase in the number of people served and the amount of produce distributed to customers. Thanks to standardized data collection, market trends can be tracked from 2020 - 2023. The Market Data Dashboard is maintained by the Adams County Health Department Epidemiology and Data Sciences Team.

	2021	2022	2023
	<i>24 markets</i>	<i>23 markets</i>	<i>25 Markets</i>
	<i>July 13 - Sept. 20</i>	<i>July 12<sup>th</sup> - Sept. 29<sup>th</sup></i>	<i>June 20<sup>th</sup> - Sept. 28<sup>th</sup></i>
Total attendance	5,863	8,308	6,691
Vouchers Provided	2,438	2,587	3,374
Voucher Value	\$5	\$15	\$20
Value of produce provided at no cost	\$9,780	\$41,393	\$74,120
WIC FMNP \$5 vouchers redeemed	-	1030	1,335
(#, \$)	-	\$5,150	\$6,600

<sup>1</sup> Adams County Health Department Epidemiology and Data Sciences Team, *Healthy Farmers Market Data Dashboard*, (Adams County Health Department, 2020). <https://adcogov-health.maps.arcgis.com/apps/dashboards/01075a523b9e48829b29519f97c15772>

SNAP only recipients	181	336	431
WIC only recipients	48	290	309
SNAP & WIC recipients	27	132	236
Medicaid only recipients	-	-	383
Medicaid, WIC, & SNAP	-	-	224
Age 65 or older	1,962	1,800	2,100
Zip code most often served	80260	80233	80260: 443
	80241	80241	80233: 427
Vendors	Not available	14 businesses	16 businesses
	Not available	19 resources	21 resources

Source: [HFM Data Dashboard<sup>1</sup>](#)

#### Comparative Statistics

- 79% increase in total dollar value of produce provided at no cost to the community from 2022.
- 28.9% increase in WIC Farmers Market Nutrition Program (FMNP) vouchers redeemed from 2022.
- 30% increase in the number of \$20 vouchers distributed from 2022.
- This season, the market expanded benefits to community members who receive Medicaid benefits.
- 15 total zip codes served, 12 defined as or within blocks from a low-income/low-access census tracts compared to 9 census tracts in 2022<sup>2</sup>

Thornton: # of Attendees by zip code		Outside Thornton: # of Attendees by zip code	
80229: 386	80260: 443	80221: 150	80030: 23
80233: 427	80640: 60	80031: 108	80020: 20
80234: 119	80023: 7	80022: 97	80021: 14
80241: 403	<b>Total: 1,845</b>	80601: 49	80003: 8
		<b>Total: 469</b>	

On average, the total cash and credit card transactions were \$40 to \$75 per market. The market is reimbursed for both voucher programs, however, if the market is approved to accept SNAP and Double Up Food Bucks, this would increase both food access for communities and income for East Denver Food Hub. The small daily credit card and cash transactions underscore the importance of attracting a more economically diverse population that includes paying customers to the market.

#### Data Collection Margin of Error

- Estimates are based on survey collection, which is prone to human and technological errors.

<sup>2</sup> United States Department of Agriculture, *Food Access Research Atlas* (USDA, 2019). <https://www.ers.usda.gov/data-products/food-access-research-atlas/>

- Customers may have used a voucher received from a previous market so the total vouchers distributed that day and the total collected by EDFH may not be exact.
- Voucher credit being rolled over from one market to the next market affects the total collected in daily sales versus the number of vouchers redeemed that day.

### Considerations for future accounting processes

- Rotate the color of the vouchers for each market so vouchers from another day cannot be redeemed.
- Create signage to educate customers on how the voucher program works.

## SEASON HIGHLIGHTS

### *Customer Highlights*

The Healthy Farmers Market serves as an integrated community health hub within underserved communities, providing a gathering place for residents to access health education, health services, program benefits and services that support health all in one location. Steps are taken to include a diverse network of health-related resources by screening vendors that provide links to better health.

The Diabetes Education resources are especially appreciated by customers who are diabetic and those that want to prevent diabetes. Customers shared their experience at the end of the season.



*“I appreciated the wide variety of produce available at the Healthy Farmers Market. As a diabetic, it keeps me healthy and inspired to try new things. I liked the vendors at the market and the resources available, like the diabetes information I received. I hope you are back with more farmers next year.” - Market Customer*

Tessa, Steering Committee Facilitator, Maritza, ACHD Diabetes Educator

Customers also provided feedback on the wide variety of resources and information they received from attending the market.

*“I have been coming to the Healthy Farmers Market for a couple of years. The improvements continue to support the needs of those who are participating in this market. For example, the resources and information available at every market are very beneficial. Please continue your service to the community.”*  
*- Market Customer*

### Partner Highlights

East Denver Food Hub Farmers Market Coordinators, Alex and Tammy, contributed to the overall success of the market. While they were selling produce, they were also educating customers on the unique qualities of market produce. They shared their knowledge on how to prepare and cook available produce and handed out recipe cards. Customers commented on their experience and being able to choose from a wide variety of local produce.

*“The locally grown fruits and vegetables available at the market allowed me to make choices I may not normally be able to make. I learned how to cook brussels sprouts for the first time and really enjoyed the flavor. I appreciated the recipe ideas and the advice I got on how to prepare new foods!” – Market Customer*



EDFH Farmers Market Coordinators, Tammy and Alex



Market Manager, Monique, and Alex

### Vendor Highlights

One of the goals of the Healthy Farmers Market is to uplift small, local businesses and vendors by eliminating financial entry barriers. Vendors are provided a free space to sell their products and services. The market provides new business owners networking opportunities and a chance to grow their business.

Market vendor, Pop Arts, run by business owners, David and Vanessa, have benefited from this market model. In addition to being a vendor at both market locations. Many vendors at the market are also eligible for the voucher program.



*"My family has truly enjoyed being a part of the Healthy Farmers Market this season. Not only does the market provide my family with fresh locally grown vegetables and fruit, it also gives me a chance to teach my son the importance of eating healthily. He loves to pick out his favorite fruits and vegetables while we are at the market. Thank you for the opportunity to be a part of the market. PopArts plans to come back!" – David*

As new business owners, Dave and Vanessa have been able to network with other market vendors and learn how to grow their business. In addition to weekly market sales, their connections allowed them to increase sales. Dave appreciated the learning experience and the networking opportunities and believes he will be even more profitable next season.

Rose runs Ramon's Burritos and has participated in both market locations in the past. She sells her burritos at several other Colorado Farmers Markets; however, she especially enjoys coming to the Healthy Farmers Market on weekday mornings. Along with burritos, Rose sells salsa, chili sauce, tamales, and tortillas at an affordable price. Her burritos are a favorite among market staff and vendors. Customers appreciated Ramon's Burritos as much as the staff did.



*"As a senior living alone, it is hard to cook for just one. I really appreciate all the fresh fruits and vegetables at the farmers market which provide healthy variety for my diet. I really enjoyed Ramon's Burritos as they are reasonably priced and very high quality. I would often buy 4 or 5 of them to stock up for the week because I don't cook much. It would be wonderful if there were more vendors selling healthy premade food for those of us with either busy schedules or just not into cooking." - Market Customer*



The vendors are their own community. They help promote each other's businesses and are always available to help each other with market set up and tear down.



Providing a vendor fee-free market equates to greater accessibility for new and small business owners from the community, who can pass the savings onto the customers. Providing food, beverages, crafts, flowers, and services at a lower price point gives customers the opportunity to purchase items they might not normally be able to afford. Having a variety of vendors also helps draw in customers who are not eligible for the produce voucher but come to the market to enjoy a burrito, grab a cup of coffee and purchase products from the vendors.

### Resources Highlights

Accessing resources and program benefits at the market is one of the goals of the Healthy Farmers Market. Employees from Adams County Health Department and Adams County Human Services regularly attended the market to provide resources and answer questions in English and Spanish.



Health Enrollment Team, Crystal and Patty

*“As the Health Enrollment team, we are excited about the opportunity to be in touch with people who are on Medicaid and CHP plus and to reach out to those that may be eligible to receive benefits. The Healthy Farmers Market has provided a place for our team to answer questions and follow-up on services. We want to strive to meet the community where they are.” -Patty, Adams County Health Department Health Enrollment Specialist*

### Entertainment Highlights

The market had entertainment such as live music, a caricature artist and circus performances to celebrate community gathering in a warm and welcoming environment. Customers appreciated having entertainment while they stood in the produce line. The entertainment created a vibrant atmosphere and drew more library patrons, families and paying customers to the market.

Marco, the entertainer from Kwikdrawtoonz (pictured right), drew personalized caricatures of market customers. He was a great addition to the market and families were delighted to discover that his caricatures were free!



### *Market Manager Highlights*

- Having the opportunity to encourage healthy eating and a healthy lifestyle by helping provide free and low-cost Colorado grown produce to the community.
- Building relationships with customers, vendors, volunteers, and market staff and receiving positive feedback on customer service improvements.
- Attending a variety of Colorado Farmers Markets to gather new ideas, examine other market models and network with fellow market managers.
- Touring East Denver Food Hub to learn how food is distributed to the community from 50+ farms.
- Working alongside the Thornton Community Connections staff and being welcomed as part of the team.

### *Healthy Farmers Market Leadership Day Highlights*

Steering Committee Agency leadership was invited to join the Healthy Farmers Market on August 31, 2023. Adams County Health Department, Adams County Human Services, Anythink Library, the American Heart Association, and the City of Thornton had leadership attend (pictured below with Steering Committee members). The Steering Committee provided a tour of the market, an update on local food access, and food security priorities. An Infographic was provided to leadership highlighting the number of produce vouchers distributed, the dollar amount of produce provided to the community and a heat map of those accessing vouchers. Statistics for the Infographic were from the Healthy Farmers Market Dashboard.



## SECTION 2: CURRENT AND FUTURE IMPROVEMENTS

### 2023 IMPROVEMENTS

It is evident that customer service matters to market customers. Regular market attendees provided suggestions on market improvements. Despite some limitations of being able to put their suggestions in place, the feedback on market improvements was welcomed and appreciated by market staff. Highlighted below are key observations and improvements executed this season as well as recommendations for future market seasons.

#### 1. Convenience, organization and having a pleasant experience at the market is important.

Customers appreciated the effort market staff, EDFH Farmers Market Coordinators, vendors and volunteers put forth to ensure the market was a pleasant experience. Even when there were long wait times for produce and it was hot, customers noticed improvements and thanked the market staff. Comfort measures and organizational improvements this season added to overall customer satisfaction.

##### *Comfort Measure Improvements*

- Ensured to provide an extra shade tent where line forms to provide shade at every market.
- Added 6 chairs for customers to sit in before the market opened and at least one chair placed under the shade tent for customers to rest while waiting in line.
- Added a fan/misting system under the shade tent.

##### *Organizational Improvements*

Changes were made to the East Denver Food Hub (EDFH) set up mid-season based on customer feedback and discussions with EDFH leadership and Steering Committee members. Instead of a straight line, an L shape was created, and an additional shade tent was added for the EDFH Farmers Market Coordinators. Customers who knew exactly what they wanted could select their items and then fall into one of the two lines forming at check-out. Customers who needed more time to shop, bag items and compare prices didn't feel as rushed to make their food choices because they were not holding up the line.

*Dozens of customers commented on how helpful the new EDFH set-up was in speeding up the line and allowing more visibility at check-out.*

*The expanded set-up also provided more space to display produce and volunteers more room behind the stand to restock items and manage bins without getting in the way of the check-out area.*



## 2. Signage with pricing should always be displayed in key locations throughout the market.

A top priority this season was to improve signage at the market. In addition to the whiteboard displaying the produce available and the price, new signs were created that included the growing practice for each item, the source farm, and the location. This additional information helped educate customers, prompted customers to ask more questions about the produce.

### *Signage Improvements*

The produce price list was printed on an 11 x 17 poster and attached to the EDFH canopy pole and on a whiteboard at the market check-in. Customers appreciated being able to see the prices as they selected their produce and to discuss the produce of the day prior to market opening. A sign was added to the market tent inviting customers to check in to see if they qualify for a produce voucher. Signs were printed in English and Spanish.



Next season produce signs need to be more professionally displayed and easier to hang and take down. Placard holders may be the best option since every market will have a new sign displaying the produce of the day. Better signage at the market entrance is important so customers who do not want to answer the eligibility questions for a produce voucher or already know they don't qualify can bypass the initial survey line and enter the market. However, it is important to note that customers not eligible for the voucher still must stand in the produce line. Customers coming from the library or those who dropped by because they saw the market sign became discouraged when they realized that they would have to stand in a long line to purchase their produce.

## 3. There is a demand for diversity of items, a variety of vendors and maintaining reasonable pricing.

For the market to grow and become more sustainable, a diversity of items and a variety of vendors need to be consistently present at each market. Since the market does not charge a space fee or require a percentage of the sales, the savings can be passed on to the customers.

### *Sales Improvements*

To attract customers to vendor booths, the market staff encouraged the vendors to offer a variety of price points and clearly display their prices. Even more expensive market items, like flowers, were priced affordably. Bee Blossom Farms allowed customers to create their own bouquet and thereby choose their own price point based on the quantity of flowers they chose. When this vendor changed the way

they sold flowers at the market, from a fixed bouquet price of \$20, to having customers create their bouquet, they attracted more customers and often sold out of flowers by the end of the market.

**4. Having a market manager helped improve the overall customer service experience.**

The Healthy Farmers Market Steering Committee onboarded their first Market Manager. This position, funded by Adams County Health Department, provided direct support to the vendors, customers, and partners. Having an onsite manager for the first time in 2023 allowed for the Steering Committee to work on sustainability, funding, contracting, and decision-making, while the Market Manager focused solely on customer satisfaction, onsite operations, completing orders, and market improvements.

**5. Partnering with the Parks Department to help with the market.**

Maintaining a close rapport with Parks Department staff, who helped set-up and tear down at every market, is essential. Four Park employees were nominated for the City of Thornton’s Distinguished Service Award to extend thanks and build rapport. Parks supervisor contacts are listed in Appendix A.

**6. Having entertainment is important in creating a vibrant and family friendly environment.**

One of the goals of the Healthy Farmers Market is to create a safe and family-friendly gathering space with reduced feelings of stigma. This was accomplished by providing no-cost entertainment for customers. Anythink Libraries supported the market by booking and paying for three different entertainers that rotated through the season two times providing entertainment at 9 of the 23 markets. Having entertainment encouraged more families to come by. On days with entertainment, vendors commented that it boosted their sales because it attracted more paying customers.



Circus Foundry Entertainers



Playground Ensemble Musicians

*Entertainment Expansion*

The Knotty Gathering, a new vendor, offered free crafting activities to market customers. Families appreciated having an activity for their children to engage in while shopping at the market. Providing activities for children is a great way to draw families to the market. Posting the entertainment schedule

in advance and including the specific time entertainers will be at the market helps people plan. Advertising scheduled entertainment on social media also draws in a wider variety of customers.

## 7. Access to resources is an important aspect of the market.

The check-in table was full of resources from informational brochures to flyers advertising relevant events. Brochure racks were added to the check-in table to keep booklets and flyers organized.

Giveaways, like produce bags and water bottles, were frequently available at the check-in table. This encouraged customers to come to the check-in table and visit with market staff. It also provided an informal opportunity to share their market experience and customers often thanked staff for making the market possible.

Resource booths also had giveaways and were available to answer customers' questions about specific resources. For example, the ACHD team handed out free Covid tests and offered free follow-up advice. This resource was especially appreciated by seniors and families.

*"I appreciated Adams County Health Department (COVID-19 staff) participating at the market and providing free Covid-19 tests, masks and a contact number to help answer questions in English or Spanish! With ACHD's permission, I took extra tests and handed them out to my neighbors with young children and elderly grandparents. I gave them to friends who were traveling on or returning from vacation. I also went to the ACHD branch near Huron and 128th to get more tests when I ran out. Thank you for the resources you provided to the community in a time of need." - Market Customer*



Servicios de la Raza employees, Lidia and Alexis

*Servicios de La Raza's mission is to build and cultivate a thriving Colorado Latino community in which all members have the opportunities, and the support systems to achieve equity, self-sufficiency, and self-determination to lead a healthy quality of life. Their organization was a great addition to the market.*

*Steering Committee Member and Adams County Human Services Resource Coordinator, Karla Ojeda (pictured on the right), provided a variety of resources and giveaways to market customers. She managed the vendors and resources for the market and was available to Spanish-speaking market customers.*



**8. Providing a voucher to a customer who could not make it to the market and being able to use the voucher credit system is important.**

Customers appreciated being able to pick up food for a family member or an elderly friend who was unable to make it to the market. While continuing this practice is important, a policy should be enacted to clarify rules and regulations surrounding this practice.

This year the market implemented a pay it forward system. When one customer didn't redeem the entire \$20 voucher amount, the next customer was able to use the remaining credit. When the produce selection ran low and the most popular produce was sold out, customers were not redeeming the full voucher amount. This left East Denver Food Hub with a larger voucher credit at market close. To ensure accurate daily sales and to be more equitable, specific guidelines need to be outlined on how to manage the end of market voucher credit and whether the credit should be rolled over to the next market.

**CHALLENGES AND 2024 SOLUTIONS**

This section identifies the main challenges of the market and possible solutions.

**1. Long lines and wait times and confusion at the produce check-out.**

The produce vendor, East Denver Food Hub (EDFH), experienced long lines and wait times. It was challenging for parents with young children and older adult customers to manage the long wait, especially when temperatures were above 90 degrees.

Some challenges affecting wait times include having only one produce vendor, the voucher system, and inadequate staffing/volunteers. EDFH staff were very helpful in educating customers about what to do if their total exceeded or was under the \$20 voucher total, sometimes helping customers pick out different produce or put items back.

*Solution*

- Market Manager will provide approximate wait time to new customers to make an informed decision.
- The Steering Committee continues to work with EDFH to explore best practices for the voucher redemption for equity and efficiency.
- Signage explaining voucher processes will be provided.
- Volunteer recruitment will be expanded and prioritized for more support at the EDFH stand.
- New farmer outreach is occurring in 2024.

**2. The location of the market is not ideal due to lack of parking and lack of shade.**

Anythink Libraries has been the host site of the market for the past six years. However, Anythink Leadership is looking to reduce their partnership as they evaluate if the library locations are the best fit for the market to grow and evolve. On some market days there was a lack of parking, primarily at Wright Farms. The market affected parking for Anythink Library customers, staff, and partners. The market was held in the parking lot which is not shaded so the sun on the asphalt made it especially hot.

*Solutions*

- Additional shade tents will continue to be provided where the line forms to provide extra shade for customers and the produce.

- Consideration of new site accommodations include drinking water available, shaded areas, adequate parking, storage sites, ADA accessible, capacity of 400 people, close proximity to public transportation routes, and adequate hand washing facilities and restrooms.
- The Steering Committee will continue to investigate Lambertson Farms, which is owned by The City of Thornton, as a possible future farmers market location in 2025 and beyond.

McAllister Park appears to be the best option of the City of Thornton alternative locations for the 2024 and 2025 market season. The benefits of moving the market to the McAllister Park location include:

- City owned and operated.
- Adequate parking available for market customers and vendors
- Ability to store market equipment and products on site, saving time transporting and storing equipment.
- Bathroom facilities on site
- Family friendly with more green space
- Anythink Huron Street Library is ½ mile away, so site is still accessible to library patrons.
- Regional Transportation Department (RTD) Buses go past the park to accommodate customers using public transportation.

### **3. The perception remains that market produce is expensive.**

Overpriced produce was a common customer feedback. While produce may have been higher at the market compared to a local grocery store, this is not uncommon for farmers markets. EDFH priced items at fair market value while fairly compensating the farmers and producers they work with. EDFH commonly reduced the prices at the Healthy Farmers Market in consideration of the food access mission.

#### *Solutions*

- The Steering Committee will utilize educational materials provided by Colorado Growers Association and other associations to educate consumers on the differences in purchasing local produce vs produce bought from the grocery store.
- Signs will be created by Market Manager as needed with facts on the unique qualities of produce sold at farmers market including education on the difference between organic, non-GMO, naturally grown and conventional produce.
- A Nutrition Education Produce Fund has been created in the 2024 budget to help pay for onsite nutrition education activities, such as cooking/recipe demonstrations.

### **4. Recruiting consistent help was challenging.**

Recruiting and maintaining a volunteer base continues to be a challenge. Volunteers through Steering Committee organizations did not sign up regularly throughout the season. On days with little to no volunteers, responsibilities landed on the market manager and the steering committee member present. A youth and teen volunteer corps brought a team of 6-8 youth twice during the season. While having youth involved in the market provided many benefits, EDFH Coordinators communicated that it was challenging to have youth at the vendor stand.



### *Solution*

- Volunteer recruitment will continue to be prioritized in 2024. See staffing section for more details.

## **5. Vendors had slow days.**

Some days vendors did not have sufficient sales and felt discouraged. People came to the market to get produce and left the market without visiting the vendors or stopping by the resource tables. When scheduled vendors and resources do not show up, the market looked empty, so less people were drawn into the market. It is important to support the vendors so they can be successful and are encouraged to continue participating in the market.

### *Solutions*

- Market Manager responsibilities will be expanded to social media management, including highlighting vendors and resources on social media by sharing their story and promoting their business or available resources.
- Efforts to broaden the vendor base by bringing in different types of vendors and attracting businesses that have new and unusual items to attract a wider variety of customers will be prioritized.
- Vendors are encouraged to provide incentives for market customers to shop with the vendors, such as having activities for children, free samples, etc.

## **6. Lack of diversity in the customer base does not lend itself to a sustainable market model.**

The majority of those who received a voucher were adults 65 and older and not receiving public benefits.

### *Solutions*

- The Steering Committee continues to explore ways in which the market can become a SNAP vendor, given the unique structure.
- Marketing and promotion will be vamped up in 2024 to draw in more paying customers.

## **7. The time of the day is not convenient for families, people who work a day shift and some vendors.**

While many seniors appreciated a morning market, the time of day is not convenient for families, people who work a day shift and some vendors. One of the disadvantages of not offering an afternoon/evening market is missing out on potential paying customers which help make the market more sustainable.

### *Solutions*

- The Steering Committee is exploring different models and times of operation for 2024 utilizing customer and vendor feedback.
- Due to limited staffing capacity of EDFH, the Steering Committee is exploring a pre-packaged produce box pickup for an afternoon or evening operation.

## **8. Perception of market ownership creates barriers to marketing and customer communication channels.**

Many market customers are not aware that the Healthy Farmers Market is run by a partnership. Anecdotally, many customers believe the market is run by Anythink Libraries due to the location. The partnership structure creates barriers to having streamlined marketing and communication efforts.

## *Solutions*

- Healthy Farmers Market Marketing continues to be a priority, with additional funds allocated in 2024.
- Sustainability planning to identify the best market structure/facilitation continues to be a priority.
- Standalone social media pages, websites, and a newsletter run by the Market Manager will be created in 2024 to centralize market information/communication.

## **STAFFING**

### ***Intern***

The City of Thornton can enter into an agreement with Adams County Workforce and Business Center to onboard a paid intern. Funding for the position is provided through the Workforce and Business Center, meaning there is no cost to the Healthy Farmers Market. See Appendix A for contact information.

#### *Advantages of hiring a seasonal intern:*

- Help with the overall cohesiveness in running the market and directing volunteers.
- Serve as a backup in case the market manager is unable to be at the market.
- Help set up and tear down the market, especially if park staff are unavailable.

### ***Volunteers***

This season, 50 individuals volunteered at the HFM for a total of 255 volunteer hours. While it was a challenge to recruit, train and manage volunteers, maintaining a well-staffed volunteer base is essential. Having a small group of regular volunteers is ideal because they can be trained at the beginning of the season and work multiple market days. Most of the market volunteers were full-time employees who volunteered for just one market which meant training had to be repeated every time making it more time-consuming for the market manager and East Denver Food Hub Farmers Market Coordinators.

#### *Recruiting for next season:*

- The Steering Committee will continue to partner with the American Heart Association who regularly supplied volunteers to the market.
- The Market Manager will contact Mile High Youth Corp which connects young adults, ages 18-24, with opportunities to earn money while they learn and develop skills. Mile High provides the funding and transportation for the youth to work, and the organization provides the opportunity for youth to serve. Organizations can request Spanish-speaking youth.

## **MARKETING AND PROMOTION**

The market saw a 29.4% increase in customers reporting hearing of the market from marketing channels (social media, newsletters, flyers, etc.) compared to 2022. Targeted promotion of the Healthy Farmers Market is the best way to reach potential customers.

#### *Existing marketing and promotion*

- T-mail, Thornton's Weekly E-newsletter
- City of Thornton's Community Calendar
- Community Connections in Thornton (thorntonco.gov)
- Anythink Library Facebook page
- Anythink Libraries Webpage
- City of Thornton Facebook page
- Adams County social media pages, including Health Department and Human Services Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter pages
- Adams County Health Department WIC Newsletter
- Adams County Human Services SNAP texts
- Flyer distribution at community events around Adams County

#### *Marketing and Promotion Improvements in 2024*

- Post flyers at the Broomfield Workforce Center
- Advertise in all Adams County Newspapers and local magazines.
- Continue advertising at the Senior Resource Fairs
- Engage in email marketing using the existing customer contact list.
- List HFM in all Colorado market directories
- Engage in another interview with Univision, a Spanish language television station
- Build relationships with news stations and send public service announcements so reporters can feature the market on local English and Spanish news outlets
- Follow-up with Adam Badertscher, Video Production Specialist of City of Thornton, to create a market spotlight montage.
- Reach out to local news stations
- Create a stand-alone HFM website and HFM Facebook Page, let vendors tag the HFM page.
- Eliminate old and incorrect information on existing Facebook Pages
- Utilize bus stop and billboard advertisements to increase marketing reach.
- List Healthy Farmers Market in statewide directories. See Appendix B for existing statewide directories.
- Improve the SEO (search engine optimization) on websites for targeted keywords.

#### *Social Media Posts*

- Remind customers 1-2 days before the market.
- Share a picture or video when the market opens so people can check it out.
- Highlight a vendor by taking a picture or video and give them a shout out. Check out [tag the vendor]. We're glad to have them be part of the market. Come say hi and check out their [name some of their products].
- Highlight what's in season. [Name of fruit/vegetable] is now in season! Perfect on a summer day, come and get them.

## SECTION 3: EVALUATION AND SUSTAINABILITY

### MARKET FEEDBACK

#### *Customer Feedback Methods*

##### *1. Community Listening Sessions*

The Healthy Farmers Market Steering Committee hosted two Community Listening Sessions (CLS) in November 2023 for the first time. The goal was to gather community feedback to help improve the markets and to further the mission to increase access to fresh produce to communities identified as food insecure.

The online via zoom CLS had 12 participants and the in-person session had 17 participants. A diverse group was represented including 22 participants who regularly attended the market, 3 participants who attended at least one market and 4 participants who had never attended the market. Two participants were market vendors and customers eligible for the voucher program. Spanish speaking interpreters were present at both sessions and childcare was provided for the in-person session. A \$25 Visa gift card was provided to each participant as compensation for their time.

##### *2. Customer Feedback via Index Cards*

During the last week of the market, index cards were distributed to market customers requesting feedback on their market experience. It was a great way to informally capture customers' comments. The secondary objective was to obtain contact information so staff could invite customers to the Community Listening Session and send them a Community Survey. A total of 50 index cards were returned.

##### *3. Community and Vendor Surveys*

Steering Committee members are updating survey questions for the Community Survey and the Vendor Survey. Results from both surveys will be made available in the new year.

### FARMER OUTREACH

East Denver Food Hub (EDFH) prioritizes purchasing wholesale produce and foods while reducing logistical and financial burdens for farms owned by historically marginalized farmers. Partnering with East Denver Food Hub (EDFH) is an excellent fit for the market and have committed to serving through the 2024 market season.

Steering Committee members are seeking another farmer to add to the market. In addition to working with East Denver Food Hub, outreach should include meeting with Colorado Farmers Market Association leadership, participating in the Mile High Farmer's Market Committee and the Rocky Mountain Farmer's Union.

Finding at least one additional farmer to participate in the market will help reduce lines, improve variety and quantity of produce, and permits continuation of the markets if one of the market farmers is unavailable. A flyer is being produced that will be distributed in the farming community to help recruit another market farmer. See Appendix A for farmers and farm association contacts.

## SUSTAINABILITY AND FUTURE PLANS

Creating a sustainable market is essential to the long-term health of the market. One of the main goals of the HFM Steering Committee is to transition the underlying structure and partnership of the Healthy Farmers Markets to one that is led by and for the community.

Adams County Health Department is leading efforts to hire a consultant to evaluate the current state of the markets and to develop a sustainability plan to be delivered in 2024. The consultant will create a transition plan detailing the creation of a new administrative structure that will operate, guide, and govern the farmers market and help build out a community advisory board. By utilizing the Spectrum of Community Engagement to Ownership framework for reference, the Steering Committee and consultant will work towards creating a community ownership model.<sup>3</sup> Engaging local elected officials, strengthening partnerships, and seeking out new partnerships will help determine the best sector to take on ownership of the markets. Appendix A lists several possible partnering organizations.

As part of the sustainability plan, other farmers market models will be explored to help identify how the Healthy Farmers Market can be run. Examining other city-sponsored farmers markets, increasing partnerships and capacity is a top priority in 2024. Becoming a SNAP vendor is a top priority for the Steering Committee.

In the future, the Healthy Farmers Market Steering Committee will begin strategic planning to explore expanding voucher food categories to hot and prepared foods, and to develop a toolkit for replication of food access farmers market model for use by other municipalities.

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<sup>3</sup> Rosa Gonzalez, *The Spectrum of Community Engagement to Ownership* (Facilitating Power, 2019).

## APPENDICES

### Appendix A: Important Contacts

#### *Existing Partners*

#### **Nourish**

Gretchen Groenke, Nutrition Programs Coordinator, manages FMNP for WIC  
[Gretchen@NourishColorado.org](mailto:Gretchen@NourishColorado.org), 970-715-1442

#### **Adams County Business Services, Workforce and Business Center**

Andrew Horner, Business Development Representative  
[ahorner@adcogov.org](mailto:ahorner@adcogov.org), 720-523-2458

#### **Mile High Youth Corps**

[www.milehighyouthcorps.org](http://www.milehighyouthcorps.org), 303-433-1206

#### **Colorado Farmer's Market Association**

Rosalind May, Coordinator, Executive Director  
[www.cofarmersmarkets.org](http://www.cofarmersmarkets.org), [rosalind.may@cofarmersmarkets.org](mailto:rosalind.may@cofarmersmarkets.org),  
CFMA Conference Palisade/Grand Junction, March 8th - 10<sup>th</sup>, 2024

#### **National Farmer's Market Coalition**

[Home - Farmers Market Coalition](#)

#### **Parks Maintenance Supervisors**

Leni Vaimagalo: 303-378-2449, [leni.vaimagalo@thorntonco.gov](mailto:leni.vaimagalo@thorntonco.gov)  
Matt Schutter: 303-255-7824, [matt.schutter@thorntonco.gov](mailto:matt.schutter@thorntonco.gov)

#### *Farmer Outreach*

#### **Rocky Mountain Farmers Union**

Marion Kalb, Coordinator  
Rocky Mountain Farmers Union | RMFU, [marion.kalb@denvergov.org](mailto:marion.kalb@denvergov.org)  
303-752-5800

#### **Mile High Farmers** (*Mile High Farmer's Producer's Summit: February 10, 2024*)

Willow Cozzens, Coordinator  
[www.milehighfarmers.com](http://www.milehighfarmers.com), [milehighfarmers@gmail.com](mailto:milehighfarmers@gmail.com)  
720-454-9284

#### **Go Farm**

Jess Solis, Community Food Access Program  
[www.gofarm.org](http://www.gofarm.org), [jess@gofarm.org](mailto:jess@gofarm.org)  
720-580-3276

#### **Helpful Links:**

Colorado Farmers Market Association – Connecting Farmers and Consumers (cofarmersmarkets.org)

Home - Farmers Market Coalition

*Potential Partnering Organizations*

**City of Thornton Economic Development**

Brenda Gomez, Business Outreach Specialist  
720-674-3547, [brenda.gomez@thorntonco.gov](mailto:brenda.gomez@thorntonco.gov)

**Trailhead Institute**

303-910-4682, [www.trailhead.institute](http://www.trailhead.institute)

**Colorado Nonprofit Association**

303-382-5710, [info@coloradononprofits.org](mailto:info@coloradononprofits.org)

## Appendix B: Statewide Farmers Market Directories

Directory name	Published by	Contact	E-mail	Deadline to Submit	Format	Cost	Directory focus
CO Farm Fresh Directory	CO Dept of Ag	Loretta Lopez	loretta.lopez@state.co.us	By end of February	Online/ hard copy	\$0	Farmers markets, farm stands, agricultural festivals, etc.
CFMA Map of Member Farmers Markets	CFMA	Rosalind May	cofarmersmarketassociation@gmail.com	During membership campaign in January and February, can make updates through CFMA member portal	Online	\$25 annually for directory map, \$50 annual membership	Farmers Markets
Celebrate Colorado	CO Governor's Office	Danielle Oliveto	danielle.oliveto@state.co.us	Update info on CFMA member portal by early July	Online	\$0	Events during Celebrate Colorado Week, (July 28th – Aug. 6 <sup>th</sup> )
CO Proud Directory	CO Proud (CO Dept of Ag)	Danielle Trotta	danielle.trotta@state.co.us	Anytime	Online	\$0	CO Proud members: Grown, raised or made in Colorado